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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [OVIP](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [EG](#) [IR](#) [MFA](#)

SUBJECT: CODEL WOLF MEETINGS WITH GOE MINISTERS

Classified by Ambassador Francis Ricciardone for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

1. (C) In January 15 meetings with the Ministers of Interior, Justice, and Trade-Industry, as well as with senior MFA officials, Congressman Frank R. Wolf (R-VA) pressed the GOE on the Ayman Nour case, as well as religious freedom, support for the U.S. in international fora, and discussed regional challenges. The GOE officials responded with consistency on the Nour case (that he is a convicted criminal with a shady past), though Minister Rashid, a leading reformer within the Cabinet, suggested also that unnamed anti-reform elements in the GOE had manipulated the Nour case in order to stymie the GOE's reform drive. End summary.

2. (SBU) Rep. Wolf, accompanied by the Ambassador, Chief of Staff Dan Scandling, and poloff (notetaker), met separately with Interior Minister Gen. Habib Al-Adly, Justice Minister Mahmoud Aboul Leil, and Trade and Industry Minister Rashid M. Rashid on Sunday, January 15. Due to FM Aboul Gheit's sudden trip to Kuwait for the funeral of Sheikh Jaber, MFA Assistant Minister for the Cabinet (D equivalent) Wafaa Bassim, joined by Assistant Minister for American Affairs Ali Al-Hefny, met with Rep. Wolf in place of the FM.

MFA

3. (C) In his meeting with the MFA, Rep. Wolf reviewed four areas of concern:

--Ayman Nour;
--a dearth of GOE support for U.S. positions within international fora;
--treatment of Egypt's Coptic Christian and other religious minorities; and
--Iraq and other regional challenges.

Regarding the Nour case, Rep. Wolf--who opened all of his ministerial meetings by passing to his interlocutors copies of the December 29 masthead editorials on the Nour case--told Ambassador Bassim that the Nour case has "hurt" the GOE; that Nour himself has "now become bigger than life;" and that "this has definitely created a problem" that will persist as long as Nour remains in jail.

4. (C) Regarding issues such as potential IAEA referral of Iran to the UNSC and the reform of the UN Human Rights Commission, Rep. Wolf cited the absence of GOE support. He warned that GOE support for the U.S. position on Iran and UN reform is "really going to impact Egypt's reputation in the Congress." Rep. Wolf told Bassim, "We need you on the (Iran) nuclear issue; we ask for your vote."

5. (C) On the matter of Egypt's religious minorities, Rep. Wolf stressed that members of Congress want the GOE to continue to build a "fundamental equality" for all Egyptian citizens. The GOE should consider how it can ensure that religious conversion in any direction, and to any faith, is treated equally under the law. GOE law should also adopt a unified approach for houses of worship in terms of zoning, building regulations, and permits.

6. (C) Regarding Iraq, Rep. Wolf told the MFA officials that the U.S. "needs your help" with regard to additional steps to secure and stabilize Iraq. The ramifications of a U.S. failure in Iraq, said Rep. Wolf, would be serious for the region, especially for Egypt, since jihadists in Iraq would soon direct their efforts against the Mubarak government if they ever were to succeed in Iraq.

7. (C) Regarding Ayman Nour, Bassim said "we must await the outcome of his appeal" to the Court of Cassation. She noted that the coverage of the Nour case in the Washington Post and New York Times suggested an orchestrated campaign against the GOE. She argued that notwithstanding "some problems" during the 2005 elections, Egyptians are now "inspired to

participate" in politics. "There will be mistakes on the way; you had yours," she told the Congressman, but the GOE is seeking "help and training, not just criticism." As strategic friends, she continued, the USG and the GOE must each accept the other with its "deficiencies." Assistant Minister Hefny added that "your country had 200 years" to build democratic institutions, and that no one in Egypt had ever done as much for democracy as President Mubarak did in 2005.

18. (C) Regarding the GOE position on referral of Iran to the UNSC, Bassim said that Egyptian public opinion would not allow the GOE to apply different standards to Iran and Israel. Bassim introduced her colleague, Deputy Assistant Minister for Human Rights Ehab Gamal Eddin, to present the GOE position on UN Human Rights Commission reform. Gamal Eddin said the GOE agreed about the need for reform, but also believed that democratic procedures in the UN required "universal participation" in order to make the new council more credible. The new council, he argued, should "be open to all and reflect all belief systems." Neither MFA official responded directly to Rep. Wolf's question about the legitimacy of an UN Human Rights body that allowed countries like Sudan to play a leading role.

19. (C) Bassim told Rep. Wolf that "Iraq is issue number one." Three million Egyptians live in Iraq. She cautioned, however, that the murder of the Egyptian Ambassador to Baghdad in 2005 made the GOE "once burned, twice shy." Nevertheless, Egypt was a willing and important partner in stabilizing Iraq: the GOE remained willing to provide security training in Egypt, and Orascom, the private Egyptian communications company, was playing a leading role in building the Iraq cellular phone network.

10. (C) Responding to Rep. Wolf's concerns about religious freedom, Gamal Eddin insisted that the GOE needed to continue to annotate national ID cards with religious status because different religious laws govern the civil affairs of Egypt's different confessional communities. Moreover, argued Gamal Eddin, the computerization of the national ID card system, which "is 40-50 percent complete," would have to be restarted from scratch if the GOE were to abolish the religious identity requirement at this point. Regarding Egypt's small Bahai community, Gamal Eddin admitted that the GOE needs to find "a practical way out" of the problem it has created by refusing to issue the Bahais with birth certificates and national IDs.

Interior Minister Adly

11. (C) In his meeting with Interior Minister Adly, Rep. Wolf told Adly that the Ayman Nour matter was hurting Egypt, and needed to be resolved. Minister Adly replied that Nour's case was a simple criminal matter, that the court gave the defense plenty of time to make its case, and that it would be an insult to the Egyptian judiciary to try to intervene in the matter. Adly assured Rep. Wolf that Nour, who is currently in the hospital at Torah Farms prison in south Cairo, has "full medical assistance" and "extra care." In response to Rep. Wolf's request, Adly said that he had no objection to Wolf making a visit to Ayman Nour, but that the modalities would need to be worked out with the Justice Minister.

12. (C) Rep. Wolf and the Ambassador also briefly discussed with Adly the prospects for increased USG support for modern police training (including crowd control, public affairs, responding to complaints, and community-based policing) for the GOE police services in light of the recent police violence against voters and deaths that occurred during the removal of Sudanese refugee protestors. Adly noted that he had already discussed this issue with Suzanne Mubarak, and said that he looked forward to additional discussions on such security cooperation. In addition, Adly noted that the deaths of the 27 Sudanese refugees on December 30, 2005 were "not the result of tactical police work," but rather were the unfortunate consequence of "a stampede" by the refugees after they were hit by police water cannons.

Justice Minister Aboul Leil

13. (C) In a brief meeting with the Justice Minister, Rep. Wolf reiterated his central concerns about Ayman Nour and formally sought the Minister's permission and assistance to meet with Nour. Rep. Wolf told the Minister that future codels would also seek to meet with Nour as long as he remained in jail. The Minister demurred on providing Rep. Wolf with an answer immediately, saying that he had to check first with his subordinate, the Public Prosecutor Maher Abdul Wahed, about the modalities of any visit to Nour in jail. Note: After a follow-up call by the Ambassador to Aboul

Leil, MOJ officials told emboff late on January 16 that it would not be possible for Rep. Wolf to see Nour, "due to the shortness of time." Rep. Wolf later meet with Nour's wife, Gameela Ismail, and Ghad Party Vice President Hisham Kassem, reported septel. End note.

Minister of Trade and Industry Rashid

14. (C) In his meeting with Minister of Trade Rashid, Wolf received a candid but hopeful briefing about the prospects for reform in Egypt. Rashid also asserted that the Ayman Nour case was in fact the result of an internal GOE battle between pro- and anti-reform elements, and the USG must remain steady in its support for the pro-reform elements.

15. (C) Rashid told Rep. Wolf that the new cabinet, which brought in more business leaders as minister, was committed to "change, openness, and the free market." The Egyptian economy was thriving, Rashid said, thanks to the pro-market stance of the GOE and due to the influx of petro-dollars from the Gulf. Still, said Rashid, the remaining challenges were huge. He offered as examples the bloated personnel rosters of the Ministries of Health and Agriculture, which have 720,000 and 1.1 million employees respectively. Senior physicians in the Health Ministry, said Rashid, only earn about USD 30 per month. These conditions are a recipe for inefficiency and corruption, and a massive challenge for the GOE. "It's like trying to fix a car while driving at 100 miles per hour."

16. (C) In addition, political reform challenges and regional security concerns combine to make the situation even more complex. The 2005 parliamentary elections, said Rashid, prove that Egyptian citizens "are not happy, and they have the right (to express this dissatisfaction)." The success of the Muslim Brotherhood, Rashid continued, was largely due to the GOE's "terribly bad" policies.

17. (C) Rep. Wolf reviewed for Rashid his basic points about Ayman Nour, and observed that a cynic might be forgiven for thinking that the decision to prosecute and convict Nour was the result of anti-reform forces consciously seeking to provoke the West. After a rueful chuckle, Rashid replied, "that's a true story." The decision to go after Nour, said Rashid, was the result of "people sitting around a room saying, 'How can we stop this?'" Rashid argued that, "Our real battle, which we are fighting day and night is to push both economic and political reform." Despite recent setbacks, like the Nour case, the pro-reform cause is winning, and indeed it must win, in order to forestall an eventual Muslim Brotherhood takeover of Egypt. In this context, argued Rashid, a Free Trade Agreement between Egypt and the U.S. should be seen not as a carrot or stick for the GOE, but rather as a way to lock in the reform mentality that is crucial to Egypt's political and economic success.

18. (C) Rep. Wolf told Rashid that despite Rashid's persuasive presentation, "logic sometimes loses out to reality." The Nour case and other apparent backsliding by the GOE on reform, said Rep. Wolf, are "pulling you down." Rashid, for his part, acknowledged that he understood the political realities that constrain USTR Portman and the rest of the USG as well as the Congress.

19. (U) Rep. Wolf did not clear this message before he departed.

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